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ABSTRACT

Although partially caused by sex differences in aspirations and qualifications, the underrepresentation of women in professional and managerial positions also reflects the persistence of sex discrimination at the entry level. Discrimination against women applying for traditionally male jobs seems to increase with ambiguity about the fit between the applicant qualifications and job requirements. To examine this issue, 60 male and 60 female college students evaluated a male or female applicant for the position of Residence Life Director, which was described as a masculine, feminine, or neutral sex-typed job. Ambiguity of the evaluation task was varied by amount of job-relevant information in the applicant's resume. The results revealed that applicants received better evaluations when ambiguity was low; ambiguity did not interact with other factors. Male applicants were evaluated more favorably for the masculine job than for the neutral job, but female applicants were evaluated more favorably for the neutral than for the feminine job. Same-sex favoritism was shown in salary recommendations, especially for male subjects. These findings suggest that job applicants should present as much job-relevant information as possible. (Author/NB)

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SEX BIAS IN EVALUATIONS: EFFECTS OF AMBIGUITY, JOB SEX-TYPE, AND RATER GENDER

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Sixty men and sixty women evaluated a male or female applicant for the position of Residence Life Director, which was described as a masculine, feminine, or neutral sex-typed job. Ambiguity of the evaluation task was varied by amount of job-relevant information in the applicant's resume. Applicants received better evaluations when ambiguity was low; ambiguity did not interact with other factors. Male applicants were evaluated more favorably for the masculine job than for the neutral job, but female applicants were evaluated more favorably for the neutral than for the feminine job. Same-sex favoritism was shown in salary recommendations, especially by male subjects.

Presented at Eastern Psychological Association Meetings, Arlington, 1987.

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Sex Bias in Evaluations: Effects of Ambiguity, Job Sex-type, and Rater Gender

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PROBLEM

Although the percentage of women in the United States labor market has increased 14.9 percent since 1960, women still are concentrated in traditionally female jobs (Department of Labor, 1983). Although partially caused by sex differences in aspirations and qualifications, the underrepresentation of women in professional and managerial positions also reflects the persistence of discrimination at the entry level (cf. Terborg, 1977).

One factor that seems to increase discrimination against women applying for traditionally male jobs is ambiguity of the fit between applicant qualifications and job requirements (Gerdes & Garber, 1983; Heilman, 1984). Neither of these studies found level of ambiguity to affect evaluations of male candidates, supporting the authors' contention that ambiguity forces evaluators to resort to stereotypes to rate candidates-- for masculine sex-typed jobs, the stereotypes cause women but not men to be perceived as less qualified in ambiguous evaluations. By including feminine and neutral sex-typed jobs, the present study addressed the issue of whether both genders would be disadvantaged in ambiguous evaluations for sex-role incongruent jobs or, in contrast, discrimination against women would occur in any ambiguous evaluation (cf. Feldman-Summers and Kiesler, 1974). Also of interest was whether stereotypical evaluations would occur equally for evaluators of both genders (e.g., Rosen & Jerdee, 1973) or whether stereotypes would be applied more in judging opposite-sex applicants (e.g., Gerdes & Kelman, 1981).

SUBJECTS

Participants were 60 male and 60 female volunteers who were solicited from introductory social science classes or randomly from the student phone directory. Subjects from each source were sequentially assigned to experimental conditions to insure that no source was overrepresented in any condition.

PROCEDURE

A 2 X 2 X 2 X 3 factorial design was employed, the four factors being gender of the rater, gender of the applicant, ambiguity of the rating situation, and sex-typing of the job. Subjects believed that they were examining resumes and job descriptions to determine their clarity for future research. In every case the job description detailed an opening for a Director of Residence Life at a mid-sized, private, coeducational university. This position was selected because its usual combination of managerial and counseling responsibilities would make the manipulation of job sex-type plausible; also, few students at our institution knew which of the two top people in residential life, a man and a woman, was the director.

The sex-type of the job was varied in an introductory paragraph of general information about Residence Life Directors. Along other facts, this paragraph stated either that the majority of Residence Life Directors are male, that the majority are female, or that approximately equal numbers of males and females occupy the position.

In a resume listing work experience and extra-curricular activities as well as academic background, the applicant in each condition was portrayed as a competent (3.5 GPA) graduate of a Master of Science in Education program. To manipulate gender of the applicant, the name Michael or Jennifer Cooper was prominently displayed on the resume. Ambiguity was manipulated by adding job-relevant information to the applicant's credentials in the low ambiguity

condition: A specialization of Student Affairs Administration was noted with the M.S. degree, the applicant's graduate coursework relevant to the job was listed, and the fact that the applicant's internship was in a Residential Life Office was specified. All other information on the resumes was identical for all conditions.

Besides opinions on the job description and resume, the questionnaire also included evaluations of the applicant in the form of questions about whether the applicant had the skills for the job, how qualified the applicant was for the job, how successful the subject felt the applicant would be in the job, whether the subject would recommend the applicant for the job, and what salary (between $20,000 and $35,000) the subject would recommend for the applicant. The first four of these items were rated on 1 to 7 scales and yielded sufficient inter-item reliability to be combined into an overall evaluation measure (alpha = .87).

RESULTS

Analysis of Variance of the overall evaluation yielded a main effect for ambiguity, $F = 9.20$, $p = .003$, with low ambiguity applicants (those giving more job-relevant information) receiving better evaluations. Contrary to predictions, ambiguity did not interact with other factors. There was a two-way interaction of sex-typing of the job and gender of the applicant on the overall evaluation measure, $F = 3.33$, $p = .040$ (See Table 1). The neutral job was the only sex-type for which males and females were rated significantly different, $t = 2.69$, $p = .011$. Females were evaluated more positively for the neutral job than the feminine job, $t = 2.10$, $p = .040$; whereas, males were rated significantly better for the masculine job than for the neutral job, $t = 2.08$, $p = .042$.

On the salary measure, there was a marginal interaction of applicant gender and gender of the rater, $F = 2.95$, $p = .089$ (See Table 2). This interaction resulted from a tendency of each gender of rater to recommend higher salaries for applicants

of their own gender. The difference in salaries recommended by male evaluators for male and female applicants approached significance, t =1.69, p =.097, as did the difference in salaries suggested for female applicants by male and female evaluators, t =1.67, p =.100.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Our results suggest that all job candidates should present as much job-relevant information as possible. Ambiguity resulted in less favorable evaluations of candidates for the Residence Director position; and, this effect did not occur only for sex-role incongruent jobs as had been suggested by previous research. In an attempt to keep everything about the job except sex-type constant, we manipulated sex-type with informaton about the sex ratio rather than by changing the job requirements. Although subjects reported believing the manipulation, the jobs may not have differed enough on subjective sex-type to interact with level of ambiguity. Alternatively, even the low ambiguity condition may have contained sufficient ambiguity for stereotypes to affect decisions. Some of the results from the interaction of job sex-type with applicant gender are consistent with the expectation that applicants would receive better ratings for sex-role congruent positions. The male applicant was rated more favorably for the masculine than for the neutral job, and that fact that the female applicants was considered better than the male applicant for the neutral job could be explained by 50% female seeming like a feminine occupation to subjects. However, it is unclear why the female applicant would receive a better rating for a job described as neutral than for the same job explicitly described as predominantly female.

Evidence of same-sex favoritism occurred on the salary recommendation, probably a more subtle indicator of discrimination than evaluation for hiring. Terborg and Ilgen (1975) distinguished the willingness to hire a woman to obtain necessary skills from the willingness to pay a woman equally. Their predominantly

male subject sample assigned lower starting salaries to female than to male applicants. Similarly, in the present study male subjects showed greater same-sex favoritism than female subjects in salary recommendations; and it was for female applicants that rater gender made the most difference in salary. Unfortunately, most women in traditionally male jobs still have their salaries determined by men.

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Table 1

Effect of Applicant Gender and Job Sex-type on the Overall Evaluation

Job Sex-Type	Applicant Gender	
	Male	Female
Masculine	9.65	10.57
Feminine	11.75	11.35
Neutral	12.55	8.90

Note. Most favorable evaluation = 4, and least favorable evaluation = 28.

Table 2

Salary by Rater Gender and Applicant Gender

Rater Gender	Applicant Gender	
	Male	Female
Male	$26,067	$24,850
Female	$25,383	$26,172